

COMMISSION ON ORGANIZATION
MEDICAL SERVICES TASK FORCE

Statement Made by Dr. Alan Gregg to the Commission on April 12, 1954

Dr. Gregg began by saying that the Medical Library of the Armed Forces has been long considered one of the major resources for both medical care and medical research in the world. There are some 700,000 volumes and 300,000 pamphlets, and, in addition to this library material, there are important services of lending photostat copies, etc. to libraries elsewhere, together with the preparation and publication of the index of current medical literature. Dr. Welch compared this library with the discovery of anaesthesia in the categories of major contributions of America to medicine throughout the world.

The following statement was then read:

"Most significant scientific research becomes available in detail only in numerous but indispensable scientific journals. In this form it is both spread and stored as the basis for application of knowledge, and as the source and stimulus for similar or quite different types of further research. Having but few subscribers and little advertising, scientific journals are printed in small issues. They are expensive and often become rare in comparison to the growing numbers of research workers. No research worker can afford to subscribe to many of the journals he must consult. Nor can any one research institute afford to purchase all the back numbers of journals it needs to consult. There is no alternative to the large number of journals required to carry the immense number of facts newly and currently being discovered by research.

"For these reasons libraries and effectively arranged indexes of past and current scientific articles have become simply indispensable; no serious scientific worker can afford to neglect the literature lest he repeat experiments that have already been done or isolate himself from what others are doing. Scientific work that cannot be spread and stored for further use can hardly justify, in most cases, the funds expended for research. Consequently, one of the greatest imaginable wastes of research funds would arise from neglect of the best means of spreading, storing, and indexing of scientific articles and books.

"In the course of the Task Force's present inquiries into the efficiency and economy of medical research work supported by the Federal Government, we have obtained fore-knowledge of an impending waste of the most serious sort. In the name of 'economy' the date of October 1, 1954 has been set beyond which funds will not be approved by the Bureau of the Budget for the preparation and publishing by the Library of the Armed Forces of the Current List of Medical Literature. The Current List is a monthly index prepared and published by the Library of the more important discoveries and observations reported by workers in the medical sciences. Approximately 10,000 titles appear in each issue. Delay that is interposed in its availability to research workers means loss of time that costs money and national advantage in the quest for knowledge. What is the use of putting millions of dollars into research work and taking the most effective single step to limit the availability and use of the results of that research work? For no single decision could be more

readily devised to waste the effort and lessen the confidence of medical scientists in the good sense of Government as the supporter of medical care, prevention and research than the interruption of the preparation and publication of the Current List of the Library of the Armed Forces.

"While there is yet time to prevent a serious waste of Government research money, the Medical Services Task Force urges the Commission to request the Bureau of the Budget to rescind its decision regarding the publication costs of the Current List of the Library of the Armed Forces. To withdraw support after October 1 next would incur losses to medical research out of all proportion to the relatively picayune expenditures which presumably this notice from the Budget Bureau was expected to reduce. The Medical Services Task Force presents this request now because unless action is taken promptly the threatened paralysis of the Current List will be preceded well before October 1 by discouragement and a steadily compounding waste of research funds.

Dr. Gregg explained that, apart from the above item concerning the publication of the Current List, the Task Force wished to present to the Commission a much more general subject, namely the future status from the standpoint of administration of the Armed Forces Medical Library. He then read the following statement:

"The Medical Services Task Force furthermore believes there are adequate reasons for recommending to the Commission that Congress be asked to give a new status to what is now called the Armed Forces Medical Library. In brief, this library should be called the National Library of Medicine

and established on the same basis as the National Gallery of Art, i.e., as a bureau of the Smithsonian Institution, supported by public appropriation, belonging neither to the Army, Navy, Air Force or the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, but put under a Board charged with the responsibility of collecting and maintaining a national library of Medicine, comparable to the Board of the National Gallery of Art.

"In the light of the now numerous and widely variant activities of the Government in medical research as well as medical care which go far beyond the needs or purview of the Armed Services, neither experience nor reason shows that the Department of Defense offers the wisest administrative placement for this library. We know of no university whose library has not an acknowledged identity apart from the different faculties and departments, with whose special collections it nonetheless maintains effective relations. Budgetary criteria and forms of administrative control that are appropriate for any one or all of the Armed Forces fall, and for thirty years have fallen, lamentably short of meeting the needs of what is and will continue to be the National Library of Medicine.

"The Task Force is prepared to complete a detailed plan to the Commission since we are convinced that to maintain and increase the efficiency of what is, in its existing collections and services, the greatest medical library in the world calls for your most serious consideration as an economic and essential instrument of research and medical care."